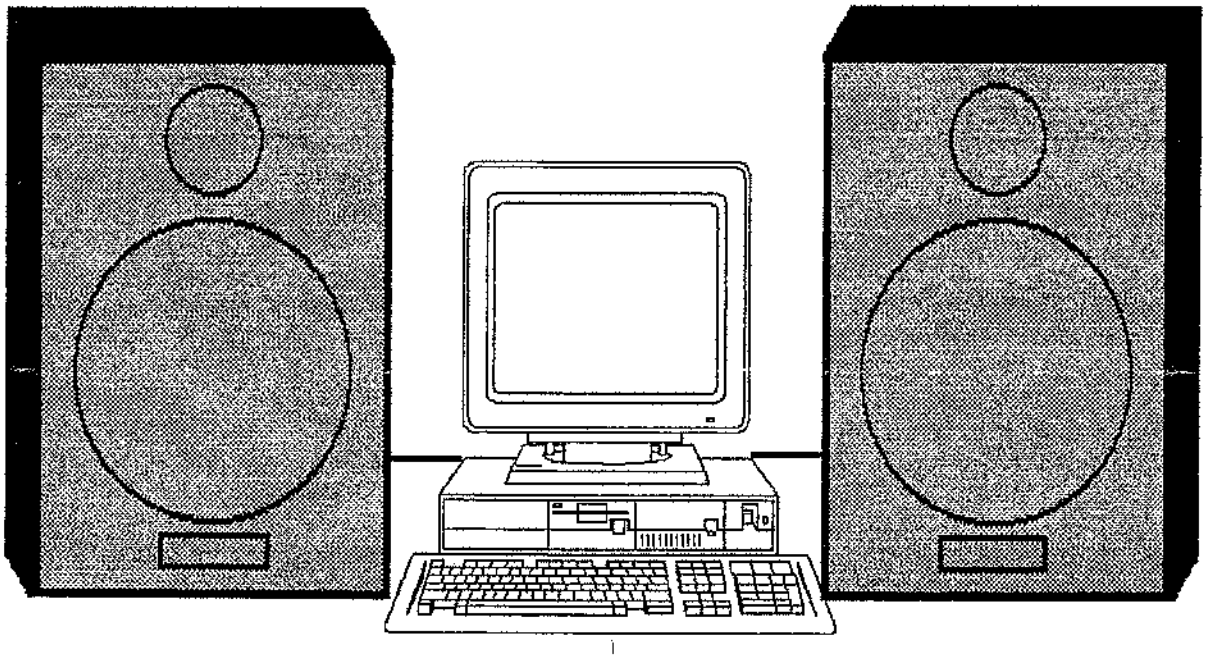
I/O

The Latrobe Valley Computer Users Group Newsletter

November 1991 Issue No. 12

The Latrobe Valley Computer Users Group is open to all interested in Personal Computing, from absolute beginners to experts. You don't need to own a computer to join. Family membership is $10 per year. For more information, ring (051) 76 6199 BH, 74 1605 AH.

Surrounded by Sound!!



Inside This Issue...

- ★DIY $10 Soundcard
- ★XDSKCOPY
- ★DOS Tips
- ★Software Reviews
- ★Buyer Beware
- ★And more...

Input/Output is the publication of the Latrobe Valley Computer Users Group. It is published monthly.

Members are encouraged to contribute material for the Newsletter, in ASCII format, if possible. It can be uploaded to a BBS ((051) 22 2122) or submitted to the editor at 12 Clift St., Traralgon 3844 (Phone 76 1730). "Letters to the Editor" should be posted to the same address.

We accept classified advertisements for inclusion in the classified section. There will be no charge to members for ads of a noncommercial nature. Commercial ads will be accepted for a nominal charge (see Classified page for more information), and the advertiser must state clearly the expected remuneration for any products or services offered. The Latrobe Valley Computer Users Group does not endorse or recommend any products or services included in commercial classified advertisements.

Please note that material published in the Newsletter represents the opinions of the authors, and does not carry the endorsement of the Newsletter Editor or the Latrobe Valley Computer Users Group.

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PHONE HELP

Some members of the LVCUG have offered to assist other members with PC related problems over the telephone (evenings, please). They are:

Phil Carter	22 2382
Paul Dzwonkowski	63 1504
Ralph Edgar	74 0987
Graeme Matheson	74 9419
Trevor Smith (Apple)	34 4332
Martin Taylor	76 1730

The Latrobe Valley Computer Users Group is a non-profit organisation formed to promote the usage and understanding of Personal Computers. It is open to all age groups and does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, creed, or national origin.

The Group meets monthly on the last Tuesday of each month at 7:30 p.m. at the Traralgon Senior Citizens Club building, corner of Princes Hwy. and Whittaker's Rd. (Victory Park), Traralgon. Meetings are open to the public.

Family membership is $10 per year. This entitles members to receive the monthly Newsletter by mail, as well as the right to use the Group's "Help Lines". We request a donation of $2 each meeting per family to help cover costs (venue fees, coffee and tea, etc.).

To join now, send your name, address, phone number and a $10 cheque payable to the Latrobe Valley Computer Users Group to:

P.O. Box 67
Yinnar, Vic. 3869

For more information, ring 74 6199 BH, 76 1730 AH.

The Committee of Management Consists of the Following:

Phil Carter.....President
Martin Taylor.....Vice President
Theresa Tate.....Secretary
Paul Dzwonkowski.....Asst. Secretary
Graeme Matheson.....Treasurer
Sheryl Taylor.....Newsletter Editor
Ross Cheater....Committee Member
Jenny Poon.....Committee Member

Caveat Emptor *(Let the Buyer Beware!!)*

So, you have decided to take the plunge and purchase that computer for which you have been so desperately saving for the last two years... Well, the time is right, as computer retailers are selling systems at very low prices (and low profit margins), to try to win the customers in what is probably an over-serviced market with too many retailers and wholesalers. This may sound great for the customer, but it can also hide some very big drawbacks if the customer doesn't know what to look for.

Firstly, where are you buying a computer from? My idea is that there are *retailers* and there are ***resellers***. A retailer is someone who not only can supply you the appropiate equipment that you require, but can also provide backup support for that equipment. These retailers are professional people who either have shop fronts or work from an office or home as a full time job. A *reseller*, on the other hand, can be any Joe Blow who sells computers from his back door just to supplement an income.

A reseller cannot supply the same type of backup service as a retailer can, as they are not in the position (or majority of the time have not the equipment) to do so. If you are contemplating purchasing from a back door operator, please don't go complaining to a retailer when things start to go wrong. We constantly hear of these problems and don't feel like telling people "I told you so!".

Secondly, when purchasing a computer system from either a retailer, or reseller, find out as much as possible about them. To do this just ask around. If a person was not happy with the service he or she had received they will soon tell you. If alot of people were not happy with the service they received, *definitely* remove that retailer/reseller from your list. Even if this person may be $50 to $100 cheaper, it is just not worth the hassle.

Next, be comfortable with the person you are buying the system from. If the salesperson seems to talk down to you, or cannot answer simple questions, then just say thank you and leave. Remember, this person will be responsible for after sales service on your system, and if you don't like them, why buy from them?

Now, for the shaky dealings. If a salesperson tells you that DOS will be loaded, but you don't need the manual, or the manuals will cost extra, they are lying. For one, they are breaching the copyright laws and they are pirating. Secondly, if they provide DOS on the system, then they *must* supply manuals. This is the LAW.

If the salesperson says that they will provide any commercial software of your choice (eg. WordPerfect, Lotus 123 etc.), but you get no manuals, registration documents, or original disks, this too is pirating, which can lead to fines up to $50,000 for the individual and $250,000 for a corporation. Additionally, an individual may face 6 month's imprisonment. This is also true for anyone who buys a computer secondhand from the classified ads or from another person.

If these people are going to break the law with software, then what would stop them from providing below standard hardware items to customers who don't know any better?

Now, when you do go to pick you computer system up, and it's all in its nice boxes, ask the saleperson to unbox them and assemble the computer so that you can see that it's running, and to verify that everything you asked for is there and loaded on. It is very dishearting to discover that when you get a system home that it doesn't work, or nothing has been loaded, especially if you are new to computers and haven't a hope in hell of knowing where to start.

So remember, when you go shopping around for a computer system, it's not just the brand name to look for, but the support you want to receive from the dealer. It's the dealer you have to confront with your problems, not the computer. It justs sits there looking dumb! (dealer or computer?).■

- THE RETAILER

Cyber BBS

Shareware for the Whole Family!

★Educational ★DOS Utilities
★Games ★Sound Blaster
★Home & Business ★Graphics + Design

Plus...

★Free Classifieds ★Graffiti Board
★Valitalk ★Daily Horoscope
★Help & Hints ★Much, much more

CALL (051) 22 2122 24 Hours

Software Reviews:

Cookdisk
PC Vision
Dollars & $ense

Cookdisk

Cookdisk is a computer based recipe book that consists of 2000 or so recipes ranging from a basic snack to a fancy cocktail.

As with any computer based record storage system, its main power lies in its ability to retrieve information that satisfies given search criteria. It is fully menu driven (no pun intended) and you can search for recipes simply by scrolling through various menus or you can give specific search criteria and it will list only those recipes that conform to your selections. For instance, you might ask it to find dishes that are made with eggs and tomato and it will list such recipes. Also, you can search for recipes suited to different types of cooking - Microwave or BBQ, etc. There is a comprehensive list of cocktails and soups, entrees, etc., to complement the main meal.

One useful aid is the Glossary list that describes in detail all the terms commonly used in cooking - from "Al Dente" to "Torte". Context sensitive help is available at all times but doesn't really need to be used very often, as the program is straightforward and uncluttered. It is a commercial program and it was listed in the green guide for a reasonable $79.00. Or, the September PC User had a free demo advertised for those interested.

PC Vision

PC Vision is a magazine on a disk. I don't think the editor at A.P.C. will lose too much sleep over this one. Magazines are the sort of thing you want to pick up and read during tea break or take to bed with you, not sit and stare at the screen for an hour or two to catch up on the latest happenings in the computer world. Normally I will browse through any decent computer magazine for a week or so before everything of interest is absorbed, but 15 minutes with PC Vision was about all it held my interest for. Also, it appeared extremely hard to find your way back to a certain place a second time - maybe lack of concentration had a lot to do with that though! Nevertheless, they could be a useful form of advertising media. Companies could promote their latest software in a way a paper mag could never compete with, as a live demo may sell a product to a person who may not even give it a glance on a piece of paper. Worth a look at the least, and, when finished, you have a 1.2 meg floppy to use for something else.

Dollars & $ense

For the last couple of years, I have been searching for an extremely user friendly accounting package - something you don't need to be a Certified Accountant to set up & use... Something that if you make a mistake and don't find it until the bank statement comes - you can simply go direct to the offending transaction and edit it without having to do a journal entry and end up with an audit trail that looks like a doodle pad. Also, I wanted a minimum of typing when entering details. It seems silly to type the same information over and over when it could be stored for instant retrieval on disk.

After purchasing several packages that promised the world and finding them all falling very short of ideal, one has finally come up that is excellent for the home user or small business that doesn't want Debtors & Creditors and a full blown accounting package, but just wants to keep accurate records to give the accountant at the end of the year. It is an American package called Dollars & $ense.

Very few people have heard of Dollars & $ense, but it is better than the likes of In House Accountant and other ones pushing for this market. There doesn't appear to be anything that the average user can't do with it. Opening Balances & Year end operations that are a nightmare on some systems are very simple. Virtually anything that is wrong can be corrected with no messy entries to journal them out. The names of people to whom cheques are often written can be stored and retrieved from a menu or simply by typing the first letter or two and pressing enter. It's the same for selecting accounts you wish to post transactions to. It remembers which accounts you normally choose for each descriptor & also has automatic transaction entry for transactions that are the same each time - these can be selected from a menu. Once it is set up, a person with one arm cut off and four fingers missing can operate it quite easily - for someone with my typing skill and speed this is essential. Bank reconciliation is easy and precise, and reports can be user defined or you can use pre-set layouts. Graphs can be produced to display trends, and there is a section for portfolios if Stocks & Bonds are your scene. There is also a section for tax predictions or similar but being an American package this section does not appear to be suitable for Australian taxation conditions.

One good feature is that the data is stored in only one file (unlike most accounting programs) which you can give any name you please, and you can back up from within the program to any location or filename you please. This enables you to have several files available to work with for different purposes - eg., you might want to keep records for two or so different operations and instead of having to set up different subdirectories with all the program and data files in each one, you can switch from one to the other in an instant from within the one program. Sometimes you may wish to back up before drastic changes are made, and this enables complete file manipulation from within the program. The copy of Dollars & $ense I have is possibly an early version and I am awaiting a reply from the Australian distributors, Mindscape International, of any possible upgrades. I believe any improvements will make it an exceptional package.■

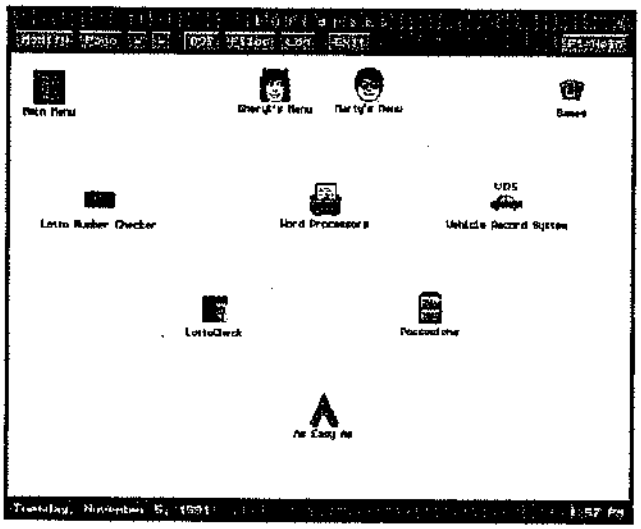
- Rob Walker

QuikMenu II

You may recall our review of the excellent shareware menu system QuikMenu, a menu that is graphics orientated and uses "buttons" which are clicked on by a mouse. Well, there is another version. This one, however, is not shareware. It is a commercial program. Called QuikMenu II, it differs to the shareware version in that is uses Windows 3 icons, or icons that you create using the built in icon editor.

In case some of you aren't familiar with icons, or Microsoft Windows Version 3, icons are small drawings or symbols that can represent the program options they are associated with. For example, a picture of a rubbish bin can be on an option that deletes old files or something. Or a plane can be attached to the Flight Simulator option.

QuikMenu II also has a file manager and a telephone dialer. With the file manager, you open a window and are presented with a list of directories. Click on one and you can delete, copy, move, rename files, and make or delete directories. Using the space-bar you can tag groups of files for deletion or moving or copying. Not bad, but the window is a bit small.



The dialer allows you to create icons that can dial a number through the modem. To do this, you click on the selected icon. You are then prompted to pickup the phone handset and hit Enter. I found this a great idea as you can have a whole page set aside, or more if necessary, for phone numbers. The one drawback we found, is that it doesn't work! For some reason the modem didn't respond. We made sure the setup was set for COM1 (COM1 or 2 selectable). We think there may be a bug in the program. Pity.

With the icon editor, you can edit an option, say Chess, and when the option "Add an Icon" is selected you have the choice of creating your own, using the built in editor, or importing a Windows 3 icon, a file ending with the extension .ICO. QuickMenu2 stores the icons in its own data file. This way, you don't have to have hundreds of .ICO files in the menu directory.

If there is already an icon in the built-in library you can edit it. However, ALL options that use that particular icon will be affected by any changes you make. Therefore, you can export that particular icon to an .ICC file, then re-import it, edit it and save it to the library. I initially had problems doing this as I was calling the icon a .ICO file. Qmenu cannot read it properly if this is done, as there must be some structural differences between the standard .ICO Windows icons and the icons Qmenu exports. By merely typing the required name and leaving off the extension, it worked fine.

There are literally thousands of different icons available through shareware libraries and on BBSs. I have about 500 icons, but I still had to create a few of my own. I am not much of an artist, but the icon editor makes it easy. Just a matter of coloring in the dots.

The usual security features are there. You can password protect individual menu items or whole pages. Screen colors can be altered to suit your taste and other options such as mouse control are configurable.

The only drawback with Quikmenu II is that the icons cannot be altered in size. For some they may appear to be a bit small, but they are the same size as the ones that appear in Windows 3. Perhaps a revision of the program may rectify this and the dialing problem.

QuikMenu II is available through OSCS software, Oregon, USA. If you are a registered user of QuikMenu, then you can purchase QuikMenu II at a discounted rate of $45. If not, then it costs $60 or thereabouts to purchase.■ - Martin Taylor

Thanks to Paul Dzwonkowski for the review copy of QuikMenu II.

Minutes from the Meeting of 29/10/91

Meeting opened at 8.00 pm

Phil Carter gave general information regarding club to all new members and visitors.

Apologies received from Graeme Matheson, Keith Robertson, Daniel Partridge, Paul Dzwonkowski, Robert Ahearne.

Treasurers report read:

Opening Bal.	$364.05
Total receipts	$384.56
Total Expenses	$197.15
Closing Balance	$551.46
Month's Profit	$187.41

Motion for acceptance Ross Cheater, seconded Martin Taylor. Vote carried by majority with Jenny Poon objecting (as a matter or routine)

Secretary's report:

Reminder that fees will be due February 1992. All fees accepted as of this date will be deemed to be for February 1992 payment.

Phil Carter reminded members that our first annual general meeting will be in February when votes for committee will become due. All members are encouraged to volunteer their services for the committee.

Trevor Smith requested that a P.O. Box be rented by the group in an effort to direct all mail for the group to one address. General discussion agreed that this matter would be brought up with Paul Dzwonkowski who was currently responsible for the maintenance of member records. It was suggested that a P.O. Box could be rented in Traralgon with a redirection to Paul's address, while Paul maintained his position. It was recognised that all committee positions were only for one year and that the redirection could be changed as necessary in the future. This matter was carried over.

CHRISTMAS PARTY:

The date for the LVCUG Christmas party has been set: Saturday 7th December, at the Taylors' home. BYO Meat & Drinks. Salads will be supplied. Trevor Smith offered the loan of tables and chairs etc. The next newsletter would request a response from the membership in order to ascertain the expected numbers attending.

DECEMBER MEETING:

As the last Tuesday of December is new Year's Eve, and the week prior to that is Christmas Eve it was decided by the majority of members present that there would be NO MEETING in December.

Harold Turner requested a SIG for beginners. Jenny Poon offered the Neighbourhood House on a Wednesday night for those interested. All interested parties could advise the committee so that arrangements can be made.

Kevin Shine suggested that a Swap meeting could be arranged by the group. Phil Carter said that he would enquire into the availability of premises. This matter was carried over.

Phil Carter advised members that Scan 84 was the current Virus Scan available. Tony Stringer gave a general warning that no source could be trusted as he had received shareware bonus disks from magazines with free viruses thrown in.

Meeting closed at 8.45

Meanings of Words

When I was learning my A B Cs
My vocabulary became a game
But now I'm getting on a bit
I find the words no longer mean the same.

Grass was something green to play on
And gardens were free of weed
Rock and roll was in full swing
Whilst hippies had their beads.

Pigs supplies our ham at Christmas
Whilst smack was given for being bad
Coke was a cool and fizzy drink
And long hair became the latest fad.

Poppy seeds were carefully planted
To bloom on a very special day
Shoot-up meant a fireworks display
Whilst happy was another word for gay.

H was the bomb that ended war
And tracks were used by a racing car
Ecstasy was the ultimate delight
Whilst dope referred to someone under par.

A hit was used in sporting contests
And a bong was a name considered rude
Scarred veins were found in silver mines
Whilst foil was a cover for food.

The dictionary now has been re-written
And my vocabulary must start anew
For words we learnt and grew up with
Have different meanings from the ones we knew.

- BILL STORES

XDSKCOPY

Do you own an AT compatible that is equipped with a 1.2 Mb or a 1.44 Mb disk drive? Do you also wish DISKCOPY would copy whole disks in one go instead of having to swap disks 2 or three times during the copy process? Now there is an answer. A local software author has produced a diskcopying programme called XDSKCOPY, or EXtended Diskcopier. This program allows you to copy a high capacity disk in one go. That is, one read, and one write. No more swapping disks two or three times to copy one disk.

Normally, DISKCOPY that comes with DOS reads what it can into available RAM and then writes it to the target disk. If the disk size goes beyond this capacity, typically 560-580kb depending on your system (more with DOS 5), you need two, sometimes three disk swaps to copy one disk. What XDSKCOPY does is to create a temporary buffer file on the hard disk and writes all the information it can into RAM, and the rest on the specified disk. You can also use a RAM disk, provided it is over 700kb in size, but copying performance isn't increased that markedly due to the low speed of the floppies.

XDSKCOPY does have a few limitations, however. You cannot do multiple copies of more than one disk at a time. You can copy the one disk many times over, but if you have a number of disks you wish to copy, say the latest word processor, for backup purposes, you have to copy the first disk, exit to DOS, run XDSKCOPY again and repeat the process. Not too bad if you run it from DOS, but a pain if you run it from a menu, especially Power Menu, as Power Menu always returns you to the top menu, even if your utility routines are one, perhaps two menu levels deep.

I believe a fix is on the way. Once this is out, then I think XDSKCOPY would be one of the better ideas to come out of the Shareware world.

XDSKCOPY also allows you to force a format of the target disk, even if it is formatted, to verify the copy as it goes, and it is also smart. It can detect the media type of the source disk. Other copiers such as DISKDUPE don't allow this. It has to be configured each time it is run. Also, COPYQM is another disk copier, but it has proven to be unreliable for me. I used it on a number of PCs, including Model 50 and 70 IBM PS/2s at work, and we found the target disks had no data on them at all. XDSKCOPY, however, worked every time. ▪

- Martin Taylor

XDSKCOPY can be registered by sending $25 to: Grant Glastonberry Box 8184, Hindley St PO Adelaide 5000 South Australia.

The unregistered version should be available in the Shareware library. If not, then we will make it available.

DOS Tips

DOS Environment & Paths

If, like me, you have a great number of directories which you need to have included in the path, you will find that your system will tend to slow down due to the long search path DOS has to go through to look for a file. Your path may look like this:

```
Path C:\;C:\Utils;C:\DOS;C:\Menu;C:\XTG;C:\copy;D:\GT;C:\
wp;C:\nu;C:\Scanners;C:\Virus

C:\VIRUS
```

and so on. If, when the PC is booted, you get a message "out of environment space", this means that your path is too long. You see, DOS allocated a default size of 256 bytes to what is called the DOS environment. This contains the path statement and other bits of information DOS uses, such as a colorful prompt. One way to increase the environment size is to add the following line to the CONFIG.SYS file:

SHELL=C:\COMMAND.COM /P /E:1024

For starters, the above line tells the PC where to find COMMAND.COM, the command interpreter. It doesn't have to lie in the root directory of your hard disk. It could be in the DOS directory. Like this:

SHELL=C:\DOS\COMMAND.COM /P /E:1024

This way, the only files you need have in the root directory would be the AUTOEXEC.BAT and CONFIG.SYS files.

Now, the /E:1024 means to make the environment size 1024 bytes, more than ample for those long paths.

Typing SET at the DOS prompt will display the following:

COMSPEC=C:\COMMAND.COM
PATH=C:\DOS;C:\UTILS and so on..

PROMPT=PG

The above is what is in the DOS environment.

The other alternative can be to stick to, say, 3 directories in the path statement in the AUTOEXEC.BAT file and to create a directory that contains batch files to run all the programs you wish to run from anywhere on the hard disk:

PATH C:\;C:\DOS;C:\BAT

In the directory C:\BAT you can have batch files that will change to the directory a particular program is located and execute it. This method will save on search time and also free up memory as increasing the environment size decreases available RAM. Not by much, mind you, but enough in these days of memory hungry programs.▪

- Martin Taylor

Classifieds

The Latrobe Valley Computer Users Group does not condone the unauthorised sale or exchange in any manner of commercial software. Only public domain and shareware may be freely exchanged within the group.

Non-commercial ads are free to members. For commercial ads, a $4 charge per 1/6 page per issue applies. To place an ad, ring (051) 76 1730.

☞ For Sale ☜

IBM Compatible XT - 640k RAM, 40 meg HD, 2 360k FDDs, CGA colour monitor, 4.77/8 mhz CPU, 101 key keyboard. $975 o.n.o. Ph. (051) 99 2298.

AST RAMpage expanded memory card for IBM XT and compatibles. Comes with 256k, expandable to 2 megs. Also, Desqview multitasking software and AST expanded memory utilities and all manuals. $150 o.n.o. Phone Ian at (051) 92 4289.

Pine Computer Desk - Has 2 drawers, monitor shelf. Ph. (051) 74 9419.

Netcomm 1234SA Smart Modem - 2400/1200 1200/75 (Discovery). Auto dial, auto answer, auto ranging. Tone and pulse dialling. Comes with manuals, software and cables. $360 o.n.o. Ph. (051) 76 1730.

XMAS PARTY
IMPORTANT NOTICE

It has been decided by the membership that our "First Annual Christmas BBQ" will be held on 7 December, 1991 at Marty's and Sheryl's house, 12 Clift St, Traralgon. It will commence at 5 pm. In the event of rain, the date will be 8 December.

BYO meat and drinks. Salads, and bread will be provided by the LVCUG. Due to a lack of refrigeration space, it would be helpful if those attending have eskys sufficiently large for their own provisions. Also, a chair or two wouldn't hurt.

In order for us to plan, it is ESSENTIAL that those who will be attending notify us. Our number is (051) 76 1730.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Our next meeting will take place on 26th November 1991.